



# SPIRIT @ FIRST

FIRST  
CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH of Essex Junction

Love. Serve. Grow.

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### Your Pastor's Ponderings.....

Emanuel Church in Hales Corner, Wisconsin near Milwaukee, has called Rev. Josh Simon by unanimous vote to be their next solo pastor! We are all saddened to be losing a trusted and valued associate pastor but also proud and happy for Josh. He will be the only pastor at the church and accepting this call will place him closer to family and friends and the place within which he grew up. Josh is thrilled in the call and opportunity to return home.

Rev. Simon's departure in 60 days will necessitate a number of activities in our shared church life. First, we will say good-bye to Josh. To begin with, we will arrange a series of opportunities for Josh to say good-bye to us and visa versa. I am sure we will have a celebratory dinner with good food and speeches, maybe even a gift. Josh will also spend some time on pastoral visits, honoring and celebrating the relationships he has developed here.

Second, we will have to arrange to cover the pastoral tasks in Josh's wheelhouse so that the ministry he covered will continue to be accomplished. This will involve both paid staff and church volunteers and we need to realize that some of his ministry tasks may not be covered during an interim time.

Third, as a congregation, we will need to conduct an ongoing conversation concerning whether we continue with a model of two full time ordained clergy or move to a more programmatic approach where we hire part time employees to cover the various tasks that are needed to conduct ministry in this day and age. Envisioning what positions are needed in this new paradigm of church as we move into the unknown future is a task for all of us. It is easy to see that we need someone to work with our youth and coordinate the lay leaders who help with our junior and senior high. But what about the possibility of an IT person to help with our technology, communication and streaming services? What about a team of stipend clergy to visit our members more regularly? What about a retired clergy to oversee membership development by following the integration of our members from their first Sunday visiting to full integration in our corporate life? What about someone to coordinate the many ways that our church stands up for mission, outreach and social justice? What about a consistent guest preacher so that everyone gets a break from Rev. Mark's sermons once a month? All of you know and love this church and have a stake in her future; envisioning what that future will be is everyone's tasks so be ready to offer your input.

And finally, we will have to hire folks to cover the various tasks of ministry whether that consists of one associate pastor or various programmatic folks. Transitions can be difficult, but I am convinced that with our incredible lay leadership and current staff, we will be able to ford the turbulent waters of change and find folks that will nurture and feed our ministry and members. As we move forward, your elected church leaders and staff will work together to fill positions, secure our many ministries and look to the future with hope.

Thrilled to be a part of shaping the future of First Church of Essex Junction, I am

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Mark

## Simon Sez...

Dear Friends,

I am writing to let you know that I have accepted a new call. On Sunday, November 20th, Emanuel Church, in the Milwaukee metro area of Wisconsin, called me to be their next settled pastor.

In August, I entered the search process when I received an encouraging email from a mentor in Wisconsin. She recommended I apply for the church she attends—soon, the church would be in the search and call process. I took this as a sign from the Spirit that it was time for me to begin searching for a new call. In the end, I did not receive a call from that church. But I continued in the search process, focusing on churches in Wisconsin.

For the last year, I have been thinking about what is next, and attending classes in social work was part of that. My classes clarified and reaffirmed my call to full-time congregational ministry, and I have enjoyed every minute of them. I know I would make for a good social worker, but my call to full-time congregational ministry is stronger.

As soon as I learned I would be the final candidate, I was filled with excitement, sadness, and gratitude. I am excited to return home to be closer to family and friends and about the new opportunity to continue to serve God and Christ's church. Sad because I am leaving you. Gratitude for the ways you have nurtured me personally and professionally. Those who made food, visited me in the hospital, and prayed for me will be in my heart always.

I have grown here so much. Because of you, I am a better administrator, preacher, teacher, and pastor. In the last five years, I have engaged in so many activities and events, from the capital campaign to Sermon Talk Back to racial justice to youth ministry and especially fruitful theological, social, and pastoral conversations. With your guidance and care, you have nurtured me to become a more mature leader and pastor. The time has come for me to take what I have learned here and apply them to my ministry in Wisconsin. It is time for me to return home.

My last Sunday here and my final sermon as your associate pastor will be on January 15, 2023. Between now and that day, we will celebrate and remember the times we have had together since I arrived on Sunday, November 19th, 2017.

Forever Grateful,

Rev. Josh Simon

### Jamaica Mission Trip - Update

by Peter Schmalz

Greetings, everyone -- the Jamaica Leadership Team met recently and we wanted to share this update with the wider church community. Due to the uncertainty of a trip to Jamaica before 2024, and the desire by some key leaders to transition out of their leadership roles, we have decided to "pause" the planning process for the next Jamaica trip. We have begun exploring ideas for an alternative mission trip, either in-country or international, that might offer a similar experience for participants, while lessening the magnitude of the planning and expense. Some options might be available through established mission organizations affiliated with the U.C.C. nationally, in line with FCCEJ's strong desire to "live out our faith." We are only at the beginning stage of this conversation, but are eager to hear feedback from the FCCEJ congregation about this, particularly after the very small number of people who responded favorably to our recent Jamaica solicitation. Some of the questions we are asking:

- ⇒ *Is the uncertainty surrounding international travel (COVID or otherwise) hindering interest in a Jamaica trip?*
- ⇒ *Does the length or expense of the typical Jamaica trip (10 days; \$800 per person) have a deterring effect?*
- ⇒ *Might people prefer an in-country mission trip to assist the needy (Native American reservation, inner city homeless center, struggling Appalachian communities, e.g.)?*
- ⇒ *Is the idea of being responsible for minors on a church mission trip a negative factor for some potential adult participants (i.e., should FCCEJ consider an adults-only mission trip)?*

Here is a link to an online survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BWN3WL7>

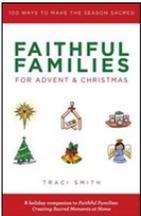
We ask that you individually reflect on these and other questions that come to mind, so that we can decide whether to discontinue planning for a Jamaica trip in 2024. We appreciate any feedback – please feel free to speak with anyone on our leadership team (Sharon Dettenrieder, Carolyn Rushford, Rev. Mark Mendes, Peter Schmalz, Kaki McGeary, Mandy Wark). Thank you in advance for your thoughts, ideas and support!

The Jamaica Leadership Team

# KINDNESS

It's time for acts of kindness. Have you talked about acts of kindness as a family? I'm sure you have done many in the past, but maybe you didn't look at them as acts of kindness. Make a list. Do some brain storming. Come up with some ideas. They can be really simple or have a lot of detail, it's really up to you. You can do them individually or as a family. The Sanctuary is all decorated and the Christmas tree is up and ready for you to write down your act of kindness on the paper ornament and add it the tree.

Let us all reach out to others and show that we care, especially during Advent as we await the birth of Jesus who came to show us how to love each other. Pick up an paper ornament in the Narthex on your way into worship, write down your act of kindness and before you leave add it to the Christmas tree.



I have a few more copies of the Faithful Families for Advent & Christmas that I'm happy to hand off to you if you do not have one already. It may look familiar to some of you. Take a look in your Christmas or Thanksgiving decorations or on your bookshelf and see if you have a copy. Advent began on Sunday, November 27th and goes through Christmas eve. Many wonderful ideas in this book of meaningful ways to move through Advent as a family. It's not a book to read cover to cover, but one with ideas and activities to pick and choose what feels good for you and your family.

Copies of our new Preparing the Way: Active Advent Calendar 2022 have been printed. Jenn Kelly and I had fun putting this together and you can find them in Marvin Lounge, the Narthex and on the movable library in Fellowship Hall. We hope you will pick one up for yourself and maybe a friend or neighbor. Place it on your fridge, next to your bible or a common place for all to see. Do the activities on the day they are printed or the day that week that works best for you. Enjoy your 'walk' through the Advent season.

All children and youth are encouraged and welcomed to participate in this year's pageant. You do not have to be able to attend all rehearsals, which began on Nov. 27th. Pageant Sunday will be on December 18th at both services and rehearsals continue on Sunday December 4th & 11th and there will be a dress rehearsal on Saturday afternoon the 17th. There is a part for everyone, however you'd like to participate. Speaking role or non-speaking role, acting or behind the scenes. We've added some adults this year who are excited to be included and happy to fill in wherever needed. Children in PreK - 5th grade who wish to join the pageant and put on a costume of an angel, sheep or shepherd are asked to join us for a quick rehearsal on December 11th following the 2nd service. If you can't make this time, not to worry, you are still encouraged to participate. Children who would like to sing Christmas carols during the pageant are welcome to join Jenny Bourn & Ed Guild on Sunday mornings in the Marvin Lounge from 9:40am to 10:05am. The group of singers may sing a carol or two or help lead the congregation in carols during the pageant. Please look for more pageant news further along in the newsletter.

I look forward to seeing you during the Advent season.

Blessed to be in ministry with you,

Laurie Chipman

Christian Education Director

# Faith Formation

**\*\*Watch for Faith@Home emails in your inbox\*\***

## Faith Formation in December

All ages are encouraged to ask questions, as we learn together about Jesus and the love our God has for everyone. On All Family Worship days children/youth participate in the full worship service with their families.

**12/4** ~ First Sunday / Communion & Spiritual Friends (PreK—2nd)

**12/11** ~ Peer Groups (PreK—8th)

**12/18** ~ Pageant Sunday / All Family Worship

**12/25** ~ All Family Worship ~ ONE service @ 10am

**January 1st** ~ All Family Worship / Communion ~ ONE service @ 10am

### 2022-23 Faith Formation Offering

Church World Service

*Building a world where there is enough for all.*

CWS walks with families all over the world as they put food on their table, connect to clean water and build what they need to thrive. Look for our display at church and information about school kits, hygiene kits, emergency clean up buckets, blankets, welcome backpack and more.

To learn more, visit them at <https://cwsglobal.org/>

### Young Apostles

(3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> graders & a Parent/Grandparent)

Recreation, mission projects, laughing & talking, and, most important, creating bonds that will steer our children into lasting friendships in their teen years. This is all found in Young Apostles.

YA will meet on January 22. Share your thoughts with Laurie at [lchipman@fcej.org](mailto:lchipman@fcej.org).



### Vacation Bible Camp 2023

Mark your calendars for August 7-11, 2023

**Hero Hotline – Called Together to Serve God!**

*'So let's strive for the things that bring peace and the things that build each other up.' Romans 14:19*

VB Camp is changing! We would like to add an afternoon session which will give families the opportunity to attend both morning and afternoon allowing parents to have a later day pick up time. Our morning session will remain the same with volunteers arriving at 8am, morning meeting at 8:30am and kiddos being dropped off between 8:45-9am with stations to rotate around to through with a pick up at 12noon. A suggested donation will be asked for those who wish to opt for the full day of 9am to 4pm and stay for the afternoon session that will include lunch, a movie, large group art project and games. Scholarships will be available.

Youth in grades 6th – 12th are encouraged to sign up to volunteer in the morning and gather community service hours. High school youth are encouraged to sign up to work the afternoon session (a couple training sessions will happen prior to camp week). Reach out to Laurie to get your name on the list, we need 4 high school youth to make our afternoon session a reality. We are also recruiting separate adult support for the afternoon session, to be present along with the youth. Donations for the afternoon session will help pay our youth workers.

Both sessions will be faith based and follow the camp theme.

## Pageant News



### *Elementary Kiddos*

#### **Christmas Carol Rehearsals for the Pageant**

Is your kiddo feeling too old to be a young angel, sheep or shepherd but would still like to participate? Come join Jenny & Ed on Sunday mornings from 9:40 to 10:05 in the Marvin Lounge - December 4 & 11. You'll have fun singing the pageant carols! We'll learn the carols that will be sung during the pageant to help lead the congregation in singing.

### *Calling ALL Youth*

#### **Christmas Pageant Rehearsal Schedule**

12/4 - Rehearsal 11:30-1:30pm

12/11 - Rehearsal 11:30-2pm, PreK-5th joining from 11:30-12noon

12/17 - Dress rehearsal 12-2pm (eat lunch before you come)

12/18 - Pageant Sunday at both 8:30am & 10:15am services (arrive at church 7:30-7:45am - get in costume, run a few scenes, announcement, set up mics)

We still have some nonspeaking parts (waiter/waitress, shepherds, magi) and speaking parts (store owner, child, shepherd, magi) and there are some set crew tasks (dress in black). PLEASE reach out to Laurie or just come on 12/4.

## High School Youth - Opportunities

Reach out to Laurie if you are interested: [lchipman@fccej.org](mailto:lchipman@fccej.org)

### **Nursery Staff**

Contact Laurie for an interview, fill out paperwork and get an orientation to the Nursery. Be on staff and earn \$20 per worship service. Possible new member class and funeral childcare also. We currently have 8 on payroll and there is room for more.

### **Holiday Gathering for High School Youth**

December 11th at 3:30pm - our once a month Nursery Staff gathering is opening up to ALL high school youth! Come join in for a time of holiday cheer, Laurie's famous apple pie, holiday cookies and reconnecting! Join us in Marvin Lounge.

### **VB Camp week - volunteer mornings & afternoon paid staff**

We are looking for 4 youth who would be interested in working the afternoon session of VB Camp the week of August 7-11th from 11:30am to 4pm. We need a commitment from 4 youth to help kick our new afternoon session into gear. Hurry and get your name on the list! You can also gain community service hours by volunteering in with the morning program from 8:30am to 12noon.

## FCCEJ Outdoor Ministry

Big news about 2023 camping weekends with FCCEJ families! We have booked a bunch of sites and we hope you mark your calendars and let us know soon if you are interested.

- Friday, June 23 to Sunday, June 25 at Button Bay State Park on Lake Champlain:  
[www.vtstateparks.com/buttonbay.html](http://www.vtstateparks.com/buttonbay.html)  
(10 tent/RV sites and 4 lean-tos)
- Friday, August 25 to Sunday, August 27 at Branbury State Park on Lake Dunmore:  
[www.vtstateparks.com/branbury.html](http://www.vtstateparks.com/branbury.html)  
(8 tent/RV sites, 1 tent only and 2 lean-tos)

By going ahead and booking these sites way in advance, we are hoping for more opportunities for families to connect in 2023. Our Missions committee voted at their November meeting to cover the costs of all these sites using the FCCEJ Outdoor Ministry fund. So, don't delay. Sign up with Laurie for a site and mark your calendars!

## Deacons Corner

How time flies! Christmas and Advent season activities are upon us! Your Deacons will ready candles and wreaths and trees and garlands, and make decisions on colors and Nativity Scene placement. Working on the rule that many hands make light work, please join us on Sunday November 20th after second service as we decorate the church inside and out. The Deacons are also excited to greet SEVEN new members as they join the congregation on the first Sunday in December. We look forward to our three services on Christmas eve..and hope the weather cooperates..to allow the early service to be held outside, as we did last year.

And I will reiterate Judy's note from last month....with the realization that this season may not be joyful for all, your Deacons would like to remind you that you can reach out to any of us or the staff should you need some extra support.

Thanks,

Maureen McKenzie, Deacon

# Missions Committee

## **DECEMBER SPECIAL OFFERINGS**

Your Missions Committee would like to let you know of two great opportunities to spread Christmas goodwill this December through two special offerings:

### **The Pastor's Fund Offering on December 24th**

In these economic uncertain times, there is a unique opportunity to help those in our local area who have financial needs. The Pastor's Fund is used at the discretion of our ministers to provide support for heating bills, emergencies, food etc. for both members and non-members. What a great way to show our caring to our neighbors in need!

### **The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross**

This United Church of Christ (UCC) special offering is dedicated to retired ministers and their families. The offering date is December 18th, but gifts are accepted before and after this date. Please label your gift as "*The Christmas Fund*" offering.

According to the UCC website, "Gifts to the Christmas Fund bring relief and hope to those who have dedicated their lives to serving our churches. By supporting the Christmas Fund, you make a huge difference and bring great joy! The Christmas Fund provides Supplementation of Small Annuities, Supplementation of Health Premiums, Emergency Grants, and Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks for retirees and those facing unforeseen financial hardship." For more information, please check out information about this offering on the UCC website:

<https://www.uccresources.com/products/the-christmas-fund-2021-special-mission-offering-pension-boards-ucc?variant=39493673680959>

## **TOM CLEARY CONCERT**

The November Community Concert @ First, performed by Tom Cleary, was an amazing success! Not only was our church and community treated to a memorable concert, but we will be donating a total of \$1,000 dollars to Essex Community Justice. Thanks to all who supported the event and especially all of you who attended.

## **THE RED TENT**



Our church and the members of the Missions Committee have long been supporters of Joint Urban Ministry Project (JUMP). As winter approaches one of the most urgent needs is socks. For our un-housed neighbors, keeping their feet warm and healthy is a major problem. JUMP has asked FCCEJ if we would be the "White Sock Church." The need is for all-cotton, new white socks. Tube socks will fit most any adult foot.

The Red Tent is in church office hallway for donations of socks and foot powder. Some may wonder why cotton instead of wool. Wool loses all its insulating properties when it gets wet, and cotton wicks moisture away from the skin, keeping feet drier. Let's fill it with all-cotton white socks and foot powder to help our community during the cold weather that is fast approaching. Here is a link for you to learn more about JUMP and this important ministry: <http://www.jumpvt.org/home.html>.



## **THE GIVING TREE**

Thank you for your overwhelming response to our Giving Tree! While the hard copy tags are gone, there are still tags left on Sign-up Genius for our Giving Tree. Follow this link to select a gift (or two) for a child in our community: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60b0a48aaad2ca2ff2-2022>. If you need assistance with Sign-up Genius, feel free to call the church office and we can walk through it together.

### **Important Reminders:**

- Deadline for gifts is December 7
- Please attach the tag number to each gift
- Please include gift receipts, especially for apparel and gift cards

Thank you for your support of this important outreach!

## Heavenly Food Pantry

People frequently ask what they can do to support our church's Food Pantry. We are asking for assistance in providing needed food. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the pantry has seen changes in how we secure food for the pantry. The Vermont Food Bank, which has always been well-stocked with food, dropped all charges for food and delivery to local pantries during the pandemic. Beginning this month, the Food Bank has resumed their fees for all food and for its delivery. Also significant is a current drop in food choices from the Food Bank.

Listed here are foods we can currently not order from the Food Bank: juice (apple, grape, etc...), baked beans, canned green beans, basmati rice, canned pastas such as spaghetti and meatballs and ravioli, chunky soups and canned fruit.

Needless to say, these items are staples in the homes of many of the clients we serve at our pantry. We distribute a substantial amount of these food items each month. We are presenting this information in the hopes that those of you who would like to assist the pantry in its mission would be willing to purchase any of these items for distribution at each pantry. The need is great. We are praying that you are moved to help us with this vital request. Food can be dropped off just outside the church office or across from the elevator in the grocery cart.

The pantry continues to need help to fulfil the delivery part of its mission. If you have an hour or so available on a food pantry day and the means to deliver 8-10 bags of food, then the pantry could use your help. Please call the church office at 802-878-5745 or send an email to [welcome@fcej.org](mailto:welcome@fcej.org).

We appreciate all the support as we continue the pantry's mission of seeing that no one goes hungry! [www.fcej.org/Serving-Others/Heavenly-Food-Pantry](http://www.fcej.org/Serving-Others/Heavenly-Food-Pantry).

## Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop News!

The Thrift Shop has had a busy fall, thanks to many regular and new customers. Donations of good, saleable items continue to pour in, and customer traffic has been steady since late September. Outdoors, the ramp and rails have been painted to freshen up the entrance and a new hydrangea plant has been added to Helena's Garden. Inside the shop, displays of inventory are ever changing, thanks to the creativity of our volunteers. Check us out on the regular posts on our Facebook page, especially the pop-up sales! Due to the generous donations and customer sales, we have been able to give \$12,000.00 to the community this holiday season. \$1,000 was given to EACH of the following organizations: Age Well Meals on Wheels, Steps to Den Domestic Violence, JUMP, VSAC (Katie Currier Scholarship), SPECTRUM, Community Justice Center, COTS, CHIPS, Pathways, Outright Vermont, and VIEW. (Voices for Inclusion in Essex and Westford). We also contributed \$500.00 to the church Giving Tree Project by helping provide outdoor winter wear for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. The Red Tent Project has also received \$50.00 worth of white socks and wreaths that have been purchased to spruce up our beautiful church! The Thrift Shop has spent this past year exploring ways to recycle and reuse the goods that we are unable to sell, both to reduce the amount we send to Goodwill and to be more environmentally conscious. We are currently donating non-saleable clothing items to an artist in Burlington who uses fabrics for her wall and floor projects. We also have a source for denim that is not sold (jeans). Outerknown, a recycling/reuse business in St. Albans makes a variety of items. And finally, plans are in the works for a collaborative project with the church youth early next year who have many ideas of how to save our environment! We continue to "Light the Way" and are grateful for generosity both in our church and our community. May Joy, Peace, and Love be with you all this holiday season!

Sue Wood

## DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS



LARRABEE, Judy 12/04  
OLUFSEN, Douglas 12/04  
PAQUETTE, Olyvia 12/04  
GUILD, Anita 12/05  
IRWIN, Joanne 12/06  
HELMSTUTLER, Tom 12/07  
KINAMAN, Russ 12/08  
WINSLOW, Mary 12/10  
FIRKEY, Pete 12/11  
FRANK, Tom 12/12  
GREGORY, Reese 12/12  
WATT, Jazlyn 12/13  
HOLLAND, Deb 12/14  
ELEY, Anthony 12/15  
GRENON, Frank 12/15  
HOFFMAN, Brian 12/15  
SCHMALZ, Zachary 12/15  
GREGORY, Rylin 12/16



SHEARER, Munroe 12/16  
TRACY, Hannah 12/18  
JOHN, Monica 12/19  
HENNESSEY, Steve 12/20  
PARKER, Linda Lou 12/20  
DEWEY, David 12/21  
EHLER-VOCK, Donna (64) 12/22  
KRESS, Faith 12/22  
BOOMHOWER, Linda 12/24  
STEIN, Terry 12/25  
GILLIAM, Ben 12/27  
PARISER, Olivia 12/28  
PERKINS, Kaelani Lyn (15) 12/28  
WATT, Deb 12/28  
BOUCHER, Arabella 12/29  
DEWEY, Christine 12/29  
TALLMAN, Kurt 12/30  
GOEDKEN, Carley 12/31

## Lunchtime Book Group

Our December meeting will be on Monday, December 19, at 11:30 in the Marvin Lounge. We will each read a Christmas short story of our choosing and share a summary or review with the rest of the group. It could also be one from one of the other faith traditions that celebrate holidays at this time of year. It could be a favorite children's story, or one strictly for grownups. We will share the message that we feel is important in the story, or perhaps how it relates to our own cultural background. There are many, many Christmas and holiday stories available online if you do a Google Search for "Christmas Short Stories." Most are free and printable.

Bring a brown bag lunch. If you would like to bring some cookies for a cookie swap, they would be most welcome, but it is certainly not necessary. Just come for fun and good fellowship.

## Craft Fest Update

The Craft Fest event made over \$6,500 this year for the church. A big thank you goes to the following:

- \* to everyone who donated to Nearly New
- \* to everyone who baked for the Sweet Shoppe
- \* to everyone who donated to the Luncheon
- \* to everyone who donated to the Silent Auction
- \* all the volunteers who greeted, cleaned & manned tables

A special thank you to the committee which includes Ann Gray, Elaine Raymond, Mary Gratton, Gail Cromie, Maureen McKenzie, Sue Conti, Wendy Wark, Phyllis Willey and Linda Bogardus.

## THE SEARCHERS

The Wednesday Night Searchers continue their exploration of the movement of God's presence in the world and our response to that presence by reading, "Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation" by Kristen Kobes Du Mez.

The book looks at Christian Nationalism and how it has not only affected the church but our politics as well and this book will surely lead to some stimulating conversations! We meet every Wednesday night from 7-9pm in the Marvin Lounge and via Zoom ID # 853 5516 9054. Everyone is invited.

## SERMON TALKBACK

Do you ever get home and discuss Rev. Mark or Rev. Josh's sermon and wonder how they reached the conclusion they did, or totally disagree with how they interpreted a particular text, or have some fascinating sentiments to add that you have read from another source, or maybe have an unanswered question? Well, Sermon Talkback is the group for you! We meet every Tuesday morning from 8:30 - 10am in Marvin Lounge. Coffee is provided and sometimes we even have some tasty treats. You can also join us via Zoom, ID# 740 803 865. All are welcome.

## BRIDGE GROUP

On the third Friday of each month, a group of us [1-3 tables] get together to have some fun playing bridge. The purpose is fun and there are no master points awarded just a jar of our pastor's jam for the winner. We usually have some cookies and snacks as well as quite a bit of interesting conversations. There are all levels of players and everyone is welcome including folks who do not attend our worship services or church. In December, we will play on the 16th from 1:30 to 4pm.

## ***To The Members of My Church Family:***

*This note comes to say a BIG "THANK YOU!" for the beautiful yellow rose and the warm wishes I received for my birthday on November 18th.*

*Sincerely,*

*Mary-Ellen Grove*

## **Yoga @ First**

New to yoga? Returning? Come sit with Jonah Moos and practice a compassionate, inquisitive sequence to integrate the mind, body, and soul. In each session, we will focus, breathe, build heat, strengthen, and relax. Tuesday evenings, from 5:00-6:15 in the Sanctuary. Wear comfortable, non restrictive clothing. Bring a mat or borrow one. Donations (to FCCEJ) welcome, but not required.

## **Fall Prevention - Tai Chi**

Join your faith family for Tai Chi class on Tuesday mornings at 10:15 in the Fellowship Hall. This is a beginner class of slow, controlled motions that aid in strength and balance. There is no charge for the class but donations to FCCEJ are appreciated. Contact Betty Adams for more information: adamsvt123@gmail.com. Sponsored by Age Well.

**~ SPECIAL SUNDAYS & SERVICES IN DECEMBER ~**

**December 4**

Communion at both services will be passed out to the congregation with individual cups of alcohol-free juice and plates of gluten-free bread. ALL are welcome at Christ's table!

**Receiving New Members**

We are thrilled to be welcoming seven new members! The faith and life experience of these seven members are not only impressive but varied and with the potential of adding gifts of differing measure for the continued expansion of our church's ministry. They are all interesting and fun! Our new members will be:

Bethany Blake	Dave Blake	Marie Benway	Bob Driver
Mary McHugh	Elizabeth Miller	Nancy Thayer	

The Blake and Miller children will not become official members of the church until they are confirmed, but they will be an integral and beloved part of our community.

**December 11**

**A Blue Christmas Service—3pm in the Sanctuary**

The holiday season from Halloween through New Year's Day can be difficult on folks as they remember loved ones that are no longer physically alive or deal with dysfunctional familial issues that seem to blossom during this period of time. Studies show that addictions, abuse, financial worries, depression, suicide and all sorts of maladies plague us more deeply during the holiday season. Plus, for those of us in the northern climes, its is darker and the cold weather all too often draws us into isolating cocoons at home. The Blue Christmas Service will lift up these times and put them within the context of a comforting and loving God. During this time, there will also be an opportunity for healing offered by our ordained clergy and Deacons. Everyone is welcome at this service and if you know someone hurting during this time of year, reach out and offer to bring them with you.

**December 18**

**Christmas Pageant / Friendship Sunday**

One of the highpoints of the Advent / Christmas Season is always the Christmas Pageant that Laurie and Josh orchestrate with our children and this year some interested adults. It is a joy to see the ancient story of Christ's birth come alive in a new way. How delightful it was to have our characters in masks in the midst of the pandemic! Both the 8:30 and 10:15am services will be blessed with this ageless presentation. Because the service is always so positive and fun, we ask everyone to invite a friend to worship with you. It's best to offer to bring a neighbor or friend yourself, usher them into the building, and sit with them in the sanctuary.

**Christmas Eve Services - Saturday, December 24**

5pm Outside Family Service	9pm Service of Lessons & Carols	11pm Contemplative Service
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We will have our popular, kid-friendly Christmas Eve Service at 5pm directly in front of the church outside on the steps and lawn. We will have special guests that will tell the story Christ's birth. This is also a great service in which to bring a young family with kids.

This is the traditional service where folks read the birth narrative, and our musicians sing of the glory of God and the unique nature of God's inbreaking in the world. We are also blessed to have a baptism planned, and music offered by our Sanctuary Choir, directed by our Choir Director, Bethany Blake.

This service is our quieter service that includes the sacrament of Holy Communion. We have some lessons and carols as well as the lighting of our candles at the midnight hour. We are also blessed to have our band Finally @ First leading music for the service.

**Christmas Sunday**

Join us Sunday morning at 10am to celebrate the birth of the Christ child. We'll have a carol-sing, a time for reflection & meditation, and Christmas treats. This will be an all-family worship service.

**First Congregational Church of Essex Junction**

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**ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED**

**Sunday Morning Worship:**

**8:30** - In-person and streamed via [youtube.com/c/fccej](https://youtube.com/c/fccej)  
Music: Bethany Blake directs our Sanctuary Choir and provides accompaniment

**10:15** - In-person—Faith Formation for PreK - 8th grade  
Music: Finally @ First Praise Band

*\*Communion is served on the 1st Sunday of each month at each service—all are welcome at Christ's table\**

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**Advent: *Lighting the Way***

**"As we work  
to create  
light for  
others, we  
naturally  
light our  
own way."**

Mary Anne Radmacher